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**Statement of Bishop John C. Wester of Salt Lake City
Chairman, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Communications Committee**

As we move forward with the immigration reform legislative process, I would like to point out several upcoming issues that can be problematic.

First, there are signs that some will try to impose more restrictions that would block the implementation of the legalization program and a path to citizenship for the 11 million undocumented. Some will argue that before we can begin welcoming new citizens we will need more fencing and blockading of the border. However, making the legalization program contingent upon border metrics that are practically impossible to achieve would effectively prevent the undocumented from ever becoming citizens, or even legal residents. Such a step would render the immigration reform program useless and the bill not worth supporting. We urge Congress to maintain the current balance between enforcement goals and improvements in the legal immigration system, including a path to citizenship.

Second, we would oppose amendments that would reduce the number of persons eligible for the path to citizenship. Additional measures to make the path to citizenship more difficult, such as an increase in fines or imposition of other difficult income and employment requirements, or amendments to remove the citizenship option altogether, also will meet our opposition.

We also will oppose amendments to prevent immigrants in the legalization program from accessing benefits, such as the earned-income tax credit, Social Security benefits, and eligibility to qualify for health-care benefits. Persons who are paying their taxes and otherwise contributing to our economy should not be barred from these benefits, to which every worker should be entitled.

By the end of the legislative process, we hope to see improvements to the current bill, not additional restrictions that exclude people from their communities and keep them in the shadows. We will work for an immigration system that reflects our values as an immigrant nation—fairness, opportunity and compassion.

Compassion is an American value. Americans are compassionate and respect and honor those who work hard in order to achieve the American dream. The American people care and are ahead of their elected officials on the issue of immigration reform. As the U.S. Senate begins its debate, we hope it will reflect the compassion and leadership already being demonstrated by the American people.